



AGRICULTURAL COUNCIL OF ARKANSAS  
BOX 1837  
WEST MEMPHIS, ARKANSAS 72303

June 13, 2001



Whitney Rick  
Chief, Research & Promotion Staff  
Cotton Program  
Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA  
Stop 0224, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250-0244

Re: Request for comments to be used in a review of 1990 amendments to the Cotton Research and Promotion Act — Docket number (CN-01-002), FR 16440, March 26, 2001.

Dear Ms. Rick:

The Agricultural Council of Arkansas strongly favors the continuation of the cotton research and promotion program. Continuation of the program is absolutely essential if cotton is to survive as an industry in the United States. We see no need in holding a referendum on the issue at this time.

The Agricultural Council of Arkansas represents producers of the major crops grown on the alluvial soils of eastern Arkansas. The Council has been working on behalf of farmers in this region since 1939. At the time the Ag Council was organized, cotton was by far the major crop produced in the state. It is no longer the major crop in the state but its economic importance continues to impact greatly on the state's economy.

The Ag Council has wholeheartedly supported cotton research and promotion since it was formally organized as a voluntary program in the early sixties. We quickly learned that if the program was to succeed, it must be financially supported by all growers. The Ag Council worked for passage of the original Cotton Research and Promotion Act with its refund provisions. Experience taught that the program must be mandatory for all producers so we supported legislation to make the program mandatory. Finally, mostly as a result of the effective promotion program, cotton product sales became so strong that imports flooded the U.S. market. The Ag Council then supported a referendum to collect the research and promotion fee on the cotton contents of textiles being imported into the country. We feel that the program has been an overwhelming success and needs to continue for the good of the U.S. cotton industry.

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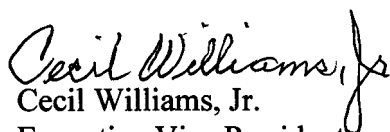
We like to think that the cotton research and promotion program has been a model for other agricultural research and promotion programs. Cotton producer leadership put a lot of thought and effort into making sure to help promulgate sound rules and regulations for governing the program so that growers and government officials could feel sure that the program was run in the best interest of everyone concerned. We believe that objective has been achieved from the beginning of the program.

Economic conditions in agriculture are extremely grave and farmers are trying to save every dime possible. Unfortunately, government has reduced funds for agricultural research. Cotton yields are shrinking. This trend must be reversed. We believe that Cotton Incorporated can provide some funds and leadership in this endeavor. All cotton producing states have benefitted from the state support programs whereby a small percentage of the cotton research and promotion funds are returned to each state to be used for research or whatever the committees in each state decide is in the best interest of the state's cotton industry. Such projects must have the approval of Cotton Incorporated, the Cotton Board and USDA. All of Arkansas' state support funds have been spent on research. We believe this program is needed more than ever.

In Arkansas, we hear no farmers wanting to kill the Cotton Research and Promotion program. Furthermore, we hear no cotton growers desirous of holding a referendum on the program at this time or anytime for that matter. Should cotton producers become unhappy with the program, there is a procedure in place for petitioning for a referendum. Referenda are very time consuming and expensive. Unfortunately, due to the dire economic conditions presently being encountered, one does not know what might happen in a referendum. Farmers who would enthusiastically vote for research and promotion in more prosperous times might vote no during this period of economic stress.

The Agricultural Council asks you to continue your marvelous record of support for the program. We further request you not to call a referendum unless producers petition for one. We are fearful that a referendum in the present perilous economic situation might endanger the program. Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

  
Cecil Williams, Jr.  
Executive Vice President